1: Herskovits E-4, 6 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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are necessary, and the elders of the family must see to it that these gods are instructed not to trouble the newly married pair. If either or both of them are devotees of deities such as Damballa, Erzilie, Ogun, or Aida Wedo, all of whom are known to be extremely jealous, these gods must be specially placated.

For the actual ceremony the couple appear each with a candle in hand, pour water on the ground in the family house of worship, and kneel and pray. The god may "come to the head" of the girl or the man or some relative of each and advise them. If it asks a gift at this time, it is either given at the moment or a promise is made to fulfill the request later. If the spirit objects to the marriage, it is wooed with offerings. Thus, for example, should the young woman be possessed by the serpent-god Damballa, who, speaking through his devotee, registered an objection to the marriage, the girl would be given such gifts as a white silk dress, white silk stockings, or some other valued object in the sacred color of the god, or some perfume which might also serve to mollify him. Or should the man's deity who registered objection be Ogun, the god of war, a fine red kerchief might be offered in honor of this god, whose color is red.[a]

The dead of both families are also notified by means of a visit to the cemetery. The days for these pilgrimages are Mondays or Fridays, and the pilgrimages must be made during either the morning or the early afternoon, since visits at night are only for evil purposes. As candles are lighted, announcement is made to the family dead of the marriage which is soon to take place, and their good offices are asked to bring it happiness. After all the family dead have been invoked, a candle is lighted before the large cross for Baron Samedi, and another behind it for Gede, the first as the ruler of cemeteries and the graves of the dead, and the second as his handy-man. Another candle is lighted for the "abandoned souls" of the family, who have died without consecration, and yet another

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for the victims of smallpox. If family traditions also tell of those shot, not in war, but as prisoners, perhaps, a candle is lighted for them outside the cemetery wall. Though the couple may perform this ceremony together, each makes this request of the dead of his or her own family as the candles are lighted. This call on the dead is repeated several days after the marriage or later, when candles are again lighted.

The sole exception to the performance of these rites before the new household is begun occurs in those cases of *plaçage* where a girl continues to live at her own home. This is rare, however, for the house of a man is usually built near that of his father, and he takes his wife there. But if special circumstances dictate otherwise, the ceremony of notifying and pacifying the family deities may be deferred, though a man must eventually present every woman with whom he lives to his family gods and in turn must be presented to the gods of the woman's family. In similar fashion the dead of both families must be adequately notified.

Marriages rarely take place in the months of November and December, the former being disliked because it is "the month of the dead," during which All Saints' Day occurs, and the latter because it ends the year. Except for the Church wedding and less elaborate festivities to celebrate the event, the rites which mark a *plaçage* mating do not greatly differ from those which mark a legal marriage, which may be described in outline. The favorite day for Church marriages is Saturday, "the day of the Virgin," and the time for the ceremony is always early morning, before the heat of the day has set in. If the home of the girl is some distance from Mirebalais, the party come to town the preceding day, the girl spending the night with some friend. Otherwise the bridegroom, accompanied by his relatives and friends, goes to the house of the girl early Saturday morning. Before the couple leave the home of her parents, water must be thrown on the ground in front of them, and also sprinkled by them before the en-

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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596 [581 603] parents are friendly toward each other, so that the conflict that might result from a division of authority rarely develops. Were it otherwise, it could easily happen that a person who had been ordered, or forbidden, to do something against his own wishes by the head of his paternal family would plead with the head of his mother's group and receive support to justify his disobedience. To most Haitians such a hypothetical incident was amusing to contemplate, for the elders are said always to work together. Rare is the occasion when one interferes with the decision of another, and never to the knowledge of the subject of such a decision.

596 888 626 A family elder who has no sons to care for him is well looked after by the other members of the group "until the grave." Fear as well as a moral obligation prompts this. "He might curse you," it is explained, or "He might say: 'Watch out for your own old age! You mistreated me in my old age, and you will suffer in yours.'" Such pronouncements are greatly dreaded, especially because of his control over the supernatural forces that aid or harm the family and its members.

428 The closeness of the tie between social institutions and economic life is most evident in the matter of inheritance. For though the prestige that accrues from the possession of wealth makes for strong competition through the exercise of individual initiative, yet supporting the struggle of an individual for the augmentation of his holdings are the forces of family sanction and family aid, while his very start in life is obtained primarily through the help of his relatives during their lifetime or the property he inherits from them at their death.

428 858 As has been suggested, all a man's children by a "legally" married wife inherit from him, or, if he has not espoused a wife by a Church wedding, the children of his *placée* wife or wives receive his property. Whether or not it is true that the "legitimate" children inherit three quarters of the possessions of their father, the "natural" children one fourth, and

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1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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the "illegitimate" none, it would seem that the children of the legal marriage have a "social duty" to care for those of a *placée* wife who receive nothing, a moral obligation which is met because of a far stronger sanction than the fear of gossip. The belief holds that the dead will deeply resent an injustice to any of his children and will cause misfortune to befall a man who does not fulfill his duty toward those who should have shared in the property of their father.

Those who do inherit divide the land, flocks, herds, and all other possessions of the deceased equally, regardless of age or sex. If a man is wealthy, he may draw up a will providing for the disposal of such items of his property as under Haitian law it is not mandatory to apportion among his children. Where there is not enough land to permit each of the survivors to work an individual plot, this may be sold and the money distributed, or those who retain the land may buy an equivalent acreage elsewhere for the others, so that some of the members of the family leave the habitation to make new homes of their own in the manner already described. Similarly, though in dividing the land it is customary to allot a good parcel to the son who has worked it, if the other land is much worse and the division is disputed, an arrangement paralleling the one described may be made to allow of a fairer division. When an heir who, for instance, has taken up permanent residence in Port-au-Prince wishes to dispose of his share instead of returning to work it or of having it cultivated for him, he sells it to his brothers and sisters, or, rarely, to a stranger, for all effort is made to retain ancestral land within the family. Similarly, a part of the property of the dead may be sold to meet claims on his estate—debts or funeral costs or the expense of erecting a tomb. This would be particularly true if these expenses had been met by one of the heirs, in which case he must be compensated before the estate may be divided. Consultation with the family elders always precedes such action, however.

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One other aspect of the apportionment of the land of an estate remains to be considered, the matter of leaving land for the support of ancestral ceremonies. There is no general agreement in Mirebalais as to the customary practice. It was first stated that four or five *carreaux* of land, which a man himself had "held in trust," are added to the inheritance of the eldest son, to be similarly held by him. The "trustee" calls in the other members of the family to help work this land, and the proceeds from marketing its entire yield are devoted to the support of family rituals, or used for such other general purposes as aiding a member of the family who requires funds to save himself from disgrace, and the family from scandalous gossip.

The practice of alienating land to provide for the worship of the ancestors would appear to be common in the southern peninsula and in the plain of the Cul-de-Sac; and one person, not a native of Mirebalais, told how he found it impossible to buy some land he wished to acquire because it had been consecrated for this purpose. Certain men cited examples of land which had belonged to the "old, old people of the family," control of which was vested in the family head and could therefore never be divided or sold. But this is land where the family house of worship stands and where ceremonies for the family deities and ancestors are held, something not at all comparable with setting aside workable land to yield a yearly income for services of the dead. The closest resemblance to this found in Mirebalais is when a man or a woman during life sets aside a portion of land or other belongings, declaring: "When I die, dispose of this and with the proceeds care for the expenses of my funeral and discharge these obligations which I leave you." Other persons spoke of land, which having been in the family for a very long period of time may not be sold, since it had proved to be extremely good, and the "will of the ancients" is that it never be alienated. Those who men-

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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tioned this latter instance advanced it as a possible alternative to the custom found elsewhere in Haiti, adding that it was the duty of the living to honor their ancestors, and not for the ancestors to make provision to honor themselves, particularly since the dead can enforce the discharge of this duty by sending illness, bad fortune, and death to those of their descendants who are remiss.

To a very appreciable degree, what is inherited forms the foundation of whatever wealth a man may accumulate during his lifetime. Yet there are few, among the peasants at least, who do not seek by all means to add to their heritage, for among those folk the ambition to obtain more and more land is a dominating one. To this end the peasant skimps and saves, depriving himself even of his important needs, until at the proper time some choice parcel of ground comes on the market.

How does a man go about accumulating the funds necessary to amass property? Ordinarily a young man is given a plot of ground by his father, and the produce, as mentioned, is marketed for him by his mother, who saves the proceeds for him. When he marries, his wife takes over this task, and together the two strive to extract as large earnings as possible from his plot. In addition, a man may take a *job*. Such work, always paid for by the unit rather than by the day or week, is usually that of cultivating a plot of ground for its owner, and the amount agreed upon is paid when the field has been harvested. The young man at the same time can also cultivate his own fields and participate in communal labor. Another way of adding to the earnings of his fields is to help the large landowners on their cotton plantations. This work is paid for in kind with baskets of cotton, which in turn are sold to factors who come from the coast to buy both large and small quantities. A man may also increase his income by working in the cane-fields or at the caldrons when the sirup is boiled. Each

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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for though some gods are feared far more than others, and some generally regarded with affection, even these latter bring great harm to a neglectful devotee, while the gods whose power validates the most malignant magic may, in certain situations, work for the good of their worshippers. Especially has there been great confusion in discussions of the so-called Dom Pédro worship. Whether or not the origin of the term as given by St. Mery is correct — that it derives from the name of its founder, a Spanish Negro from Petit-Goâve [22] — the statements that have been made concerning it are in the main misleading.[23] Thus, it is not true that the Pétro gods are unqualifiedly evil and the Rada deities unqualifiedly good; nor that blood sacrifices are made exclusively at Pétro ceremonies, while the services for other gods are innocent of such sacrificial offerings. The impression gathered in Mirebalais concerning the Pétro gods is that they are principally, though not exclusively, derived from the process of deification of powerful ancestors, which in Africa exists in forms that clearly explain the essential tradition that offers a basis for this custom as found in Haiti. This is reinforced by statements to the effect that most of the Pétro "squad" are Créole or native gods as against the Guinée deities in the other groupings. One member of the *vodun* cult, indeed, made the concept of deifying the powerful dead explicit, saying that Pétro was a great and evil *vodun* priest who had died with the *loa* not "taken from his head." For while a general principle in the cult of the dead is that in the normal course of events those who die deliver up their souls to God, making the care for these souls primarily a concern of the Church, it is recognized that there are others such as this Dom Pedro who become *loa*. This occurs when an individual, usually a priest or priestess of the *vodun* cult, who during his lifetime was known to possess great supernatural power, dies without having had his *loa* "withdrawn from his head." Burdened by these spirits, and therefore unable to get to God, his soul goes to the bottom of

1: Herskovits E-4, 6 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3 Mirebalais

a stream, there to remain until, becoming impatient, it demands to be taken out. A ceremony then brings back the tortured soul and makes of it a "*loa nan canarie*—a *loa* in a jar"—which thereafter acts as a guard for its family.

There is little agreement as to the place of residence of the *loa*. In general, it is believed that they come from Guinée each time they are called, returning when they have, in the native idiom, "descended from the heads of their horses"—that is, when the possession of their devotees has ceased. Those "under the water," however, being Haitians, remain in Haiti for seven years until the ceremony just mentioned, of putting them *nan canarie*, has been performed, when they, like the other *loa*, return to Guinée. At the same time, all recognize the African character of the *loa*, whether they be gods brought from Africa or the Créole *loa* from Haiti itself.

Worship of the *loa* is directed by priests of the cult. The terms *papaloi* and *mamaloi* as designations for male and female priests, almost universally employed by non-Haitian writers, are practically unknown in Mirebalais, where, as in most regions of Haiti, a priest is called a *hungan*, a priestess a *mambu*.[34] Besides the *hungan* (or *mambu*), and the *gangan*, a term applied to a *hungan* of renown, is the *bocor*, a practitioner of magic, not a member of any *vodun* priesthood, but a man who has acquired his power by the purchase of spirits. He is particularly differentiated from the *hungan* and *mambu* by the fact that the *loa* of their own accord are believed to have given "*connaissance*"—the knowledge of healing and helping, to these latter.[35] Not all gods can endow their devotees with this *connaissance*. Some of the Rada deities, in addition to those of the Ogun group who give it, are Legba, Damballa, Aizan, Bosu, St. Jean, and Agwe Woyo; among the Pétro gods it is conferred by Bosú Trois Cornes, Simbi d'leau, Gede, Ovange, Malt' Gran' Bois, and Malt' Calfou (Carrefour). Simbi en Deux Eaux and Simbi Proméné both give magic power, the former conferring knowledge of excellent protectives against

1: Herskovits E-4, 6 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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CHAPTER XI

THE CULT OF TWINS AND OF THE DEAD

SHARING powers and prerogatives with the *loa* in the supernatural world are the souls of the dead, the spirits of twins, and, in a specialized sense, magic, all working parts of a universe the ultimate force in which is God, who is sometimes spoken of as its Gran' Mait'. Their relative importance, however, is not easy to determine; and much less the manner in which the supernatural personalities in these divisions are linked with one another. Therefore, when such problems are presented to a group of Haitians, as whether or not the dead become *loa*, or the spirits of twins are related to those of the dead, or whether twins are the equivalent of the *loa*, or what the role of all these in magic may be, different opinions will always be heard.

One of these matters was explained by an elderly *hunsi* as follows: "*Marassa gagné morts longtemps, li deviennent loa* —Twins who have been dead a long time become *loa*," and "*Gagné gran' moun morts longtemps, deviennent loa*— There are those long dead who become *loa*," and she added: "But how this happens, I do not know." Despite a flat contradiction of this opinion by a man who was present, and a heated discussion between them, she persisted in maintaining the

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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correctness of her view, while making an honest avowal of her inability to explain how this came about. On another occasion discussion turned upon the manner in which the powers of these supernatural beings are conceived in various parts of Haiti. Said one *hungan:* "Twins are stronger than the saints (the *loa*). The *marassa* are the mothers of the saints. So it is said at Arcahaie." The reply came: "In Mirebalais they say the saints are stronger."

During a lively discussion of the point by a group of active voduists the suggestion was made by one that the relative power of the *loa*, the dead, and the twins might be determined if the numerical strength of the following of each cult could be roughly ascertained. Since all give sacrifices for the dead — even strict Church members — and all who worship the *loa* give for the *loa* and the dead, while only some of this latter group give for the *loa*, the twins, and the dead, the person who had suggested this line of inquiry concluded that the dead were therefore strongest, because no one dared ignore them. Still another opinion, though in agreement with this, was based rather on the fact that the *loa* always exhibit fear before manifestations of death, as at dances where persons possessed by Damballa or Aida Wedo avoid those possessed by Gede, since he stands so close to the dead. However, it was pointed out by others in Mirebalais that the most costly and elaborate offerings are for the *loa*, that those for the dead are smaller, and those given the twins are least impressive, which was evidence enough for them that the *loa* are the most powerful of these three categories. All agreed, however, in ascribing to the twins the least power of the three, though what the *marassa* do for good or evil they do with intensity and dispatch.

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There is ample justification, on both theological and historical grounds, for placing twins and the dead in a single general category. For, as one educated Haitian put it in pointing out that both twins and dead are worshipped on the same day, "*Marassa et morts font une chapitre pour nous* — The twins and the dead make a single chapter for us."

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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twins and the dead make a single chapter for us." This point of view is supported by a study of the twin cult as found in that part of West Africa from which so much of Haitian culture came, where a single category of the supernatural world, comprising all ancestors, includes both twins and the dead, as well as all others "who have passed through the womb of a woman." As might be expected, the concept is more elaborated in West Africa than in Haiti; but the important point is that in Haiti, though less explicitly formulated, it has persisted.

To worship twins it is not necessary either for a family to number them among its members of this generation, or to have included them within the memory of those living, for it is sufficient if a tradition exists that twins had once been born to some member of the family. If the twins are alive or lived in recent times, sacrifices are given both at Christmas and at harvest time; otherwise only at Christmas. Some families, indeed, worship twins because a *hungan* has divined that their unknown ancestors in "Guinée" had included them. There are still others who decide to worship the *marassa* without the advice of a diviner, because certain benefits are believed to come to those who worship twins, because of their power for good or evil.[1]

The source of this power is vague; one characteristic answer to a question concerning it was: "Their power comes from God. Do we ourselves know how twins are made?" It is agreed, however, that St. Nicholas is their spiritual father — an opinion based on the tale of this saint, held to have been a sorcerer who, in very early times, killed three *marassa* (the twins themselves and the *doru*, or child after twins) and salted them away in a barrel. The mother of the children came to him to offer up her prayers, and, touched by her sorrow, he resuscitated them, since when he has been their "father." The power of twins, whatever its source, is very real to the Haitians. They are believed to be able to predict rain, for ex-

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haïd SV3 Mirebalais

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ample, long before ordinary folk.[3] If promised offerings in the event of an ample harvest, their aid in bringing about this desired end is even more fruitful than that of the *loa* or the dead, who are therefore appealed to only indirectly.

Twins, however, are capricious beings, ready to do harm if they are not humored. Consequently, twins must be given anything they ask for, and it is especially important to provide them with the clothes they covet, when giving a *mangé marassa*. If their father fails to provide these new clothes, they will *kenbé* (seize) him, and he may at once have an attack of fever or a bad toothache or earache; or, more likely still, he will be seriously constipated, since this is the punishment particularly favored by the *marassa*, just as the *loa* most frequently send dysentery, and the dead cause headaches. If lack of resources makes it impossible to provide what they demand, a painstaking explanation must be given them or they will drive a person mad in the manner recounted in the following *marassa* myth:

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> There were once twins, one good and one evil. They were working a field with another brother, but the evil one refused to help. The other two, therefore, said they would not give him any food. Because of this the evil twin drove the third brother insane. After they had long prayed that he reconsider, he finally agreed to restore sanity to his brother, but insisted on inflicting deafness as a punishment, so that this brother was deaf until he died.

845 [878] [169]

At the birth of twins, special "twin plates" are provided when their birth is announced to the *loa* — either before or after their Church baptism — where offerings to the spirits of twins are placed. Usually paired, the plates may be three in number, in which case the third is for the *dosu*, the child born after twins, who is believed to be even more powerful than twins themselves and is thus an important figure in the cult.

1: Herskovits E-4, 8 (1936) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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Preferably, these cult objects are made of pottery, joined by a ligature in twos or threes, as required. The plates rest in a box or on a small table which stands in a corner of an inner room of the house. If the family worshipping the twins is a poor one, joined calabashes or wooden plates are acceptable, and such are found more often in the valley of Mirebalais than pottery plates. The "altar" made by the plates is completed by an *image* — a chromolithograph — of the twin saints, Cosmas and Damien, placed on the wall above them.

The principal rite of the twin cult is the *mangé marassa*. A minor ceremony, if the family has living twins or twins recently dead, it is held, as has already been said, at Christmas and at harvest time; otherwise only at Christmas. Yams and salt fish are separately cooked, and a dish of beans mixed with olive oil is provided. In the morning this food is taken to a closed room, where it is deposited both in the *marassa* plates and in ordinary containers placed for those who attend the rite. As the offering is made, songs such as the following are sung:

Marassa, m'a pé mandé,	Spirit of twins, I ask,
Ça wé la si 'ou content?	Are you content with what you see there?
Ago-é-é.	*Ago-é-é.*
Adoré nan pié Damballa,	Worship at the tree of Damballa,
Ago-é-é.	*Ago-é-é.*
Marassa bra,	Twins of the forest,
Marassa carrefour,	Twins of the crossroad,
M'a pé mandé,	I ask,
Ça wé la si 'ou content?	Are you content with what you see there?
Adoré nan pié humfort,	Worship at the *humfort*,
Assuré-é, ago!	Care for us, ago!
Marassa dé, trois, quatre,	Twins two, three, four,

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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M'a pé mandé, I ask,
Ça wé la si 'ou content? Are you content with what you see there?

The food is eaten the same afternoon. If the twins are actually alive, everything they wear must be new and they must have identical clothes. At the sacrifice of the January harvest, native rice, cakes, okra, bananas, and one, two, or three chickens, designated by the twins themselves, are offered. The food is put in place, and as songs are sung it is left until the following day, when it is eaten. The worship of [184] twins differs markedly in various parts of Haiti. In Leogane, for example, some have such a ceremony only at harvest time, and have a greater *mangé manman* every five years, when a goat and a chicken are killed and offered with the usual non-animal foods.

845 [71] [184] [769] Twins stand in a peculiarly intimate relation to each other, as might be expected from the traditional African belief that twins share a single soul, which, as far as could be determined, only survives in attitude in Mirebalais. Should one die, the living twin must put aside a bit of all food he eats, or a small part of any gift given him, for the other. If the twins are both girls, the attempt is usually made to have them betrothed and married at about the same time. If the female twin of a pair is married, she must give a present to her twin brother, and similarly her husband sees to it that his wife's male twin also receives a substantial gift from him as a peace offering, for it is dangerous to wait until the other decides on some overt mischief. The perplexing factor in dealing with twins is that they themselves often do not consciously will the trouble they bring. For example, should the twin of a married woman not feel friendly toward his sister's husband, though he might make a conscious effort to overcome this dislike, his spirit might proceed to use its full power to harass the man in such a way as to trouble the relationship of the couple.

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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The cult of the dead[1] is to be differentiated from the worship of the *loa* and from the twin cult in that its African form has been modified to a far greater extent than these others by the influence of the Catholic Church. Yet, though the modes in which respect is shown the dead are principally those of the Church, the attitudes and beliefs which underlie the cult —the meticulousness with which the tranquillity of the dead is insured, the fear in which they are held, and, above all, their close association with magic as an important sanction behind this force—all these take on a distinctly African tinge. Perhaps the point of view taken toward the dead, and the manner in which the living cope with their power, can best be set forth at the outset by giving a sketch of the pattern of funerary and post-funeral rites, since these form the basis of the entire cult.

Wailing by all present begins with the approach of death. There are cries such as: "*Adieù, bon Dieu, Manman ma-o, wai, wai! Jodi-a tel-et-tel quitté mouwi! Côté m'ap wé li enco'?* —Good-by, O good God, O my mother, *wai, wai!* Today such-and-such a one has died! Where will I see him again?" The members of the family tie white or black kerchiefs about their waists, while others present use kerchiefs of any color at hand. The doors of any *humfort* or *maison de servitude* in the habitation are closed, and thorny acacia branches are placed in front of them, so that the dead, who are believed to go about everywhere, cannot "spoil" the sacred place by entering it.

The body is laid in a shallow trench dug in the floor of the room, and there washed and prepared for the funeral by a professional *baigneur des morts*—man or woman according to the sex of the dead—and his assistants. Some member of the family watches them to see that the "three drops" of moisture believed to be in every dead person's mouth are not caught on a cloth when the body is turned over, for they are held to have great potency for the working of black magic, and a sorcerer would give a great deal for them. Cold water,

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969 On the following night the *mangé mort* is held, when sacrifices are given the recent and earlier dead of the family. The day is used for preparing the food, after which a table is set as for a dinner, with plates, knives, forks, salt and pepper; and sometimes chairs are placed, though this is not necessary, since it is felt that the dead prefer to eat standing. Chicken, rice, and many other types of dishes are provided, so that the tastes of all the dead may be satisfied. A stew of maize, red beans, salt beef, and pigs' feet cooked with peppers and spices are included for the *morts Guinée*. Under the table are two wooden food-containers, one for the children of the family, the other for the dogs of the household.

Shortly after darkness has fallen, the room containing the table is locked, to remain closed for some two hours, while the family, a few friends, and the *prêt' savanne* pray and sing canticles as they wait for the dead to do their feasting. Before the prayers an announcement is made for whom the food is being given; the known dead of the family are called by name, while "those drowned, those shot," and "those who come from the four corners of the earth" are also summoned. When it is judged that the dead have finished their meal, the *prêt' savanne* or an elder of the family knocks three times on the closed door before he enters and takes up a cup of sacred water and a sprig of orange leaves, with which he blesses the table by sprinkling it. He then carries one of the wooden containers to the gateway and, turning to the children, asks them three times: "*Nous contents?*—*Are you satisfied?*" to which the answer: "*Oui!*" is given. The priest makes a motion as though to place the container on the ground, but instead raises it again, repeating this maneuver for each of the four corners of the earth before he finally puts it down, whereupon all the children rush forward, each striving to obtain as much food as he can. When the children have finished eating, they wipe [976] their hands on the hair of the mistress of the house, saying: "*Grâce mist'corde.*" The family then take the other con-

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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tainer to a crossroad, where it is deposited as an offering for Legba, and its contents are eaten by the dogs, who significantly, in Dahomey are the animals sacred to this deity. Following this, the adults enter the closed room, to feast at the laden table.

Several days after the funeral two gourdes are paid a priest — "a real one," not a *prêt' savanne* — to chant a *libera* at the grave, a rite that must be repeated each year on All Saints' Day. Each year, also, food is given the dead, though "not so much as following a funeral." Chickens, beans, rice, and coffee are the principal part of such an offering, for which no priest need be called, as the ceremony is merely to let the dead know that they are not forgotten. Every three or five years, however, a large *manger* must be given for all the family dead, and if held on the family habitation, there is social dancing, where such favorites of the ancestors as the *martinique*, the *banda*, the *calebasse*, and the *sesse* are danced.[9]

Differences in procedure mark various modes of death. When a person is killed by lightning, a justice of the peace must be called and the burial is performed at once. Such a one has no "last prayer," because, death by lightning being a punishment of God, it is felt that the dead probably made an oath which he subsequently violated. Those killed by lightning or who die of smallpox are not mourned, but no explanation could be obtained for this obvious survival of African custom. If a leper has concealed his disease, mourning is worn for him, though if the cause of death is generally known this is forgone. There is customarily no mourning for suicides, and never where the regulations of the Church are rigorously applied.

If the dead person was a *vodun* priest or otherwise had strong *connaissance*, steps are taken before his death to "remove the *loa* from his head" so that his soul will not go under the water, for, as has been explained, such souls are held to be powerful spirits which may cause their family much harm

1: Herskovits E-4, 8 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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such matters as the passing on of the *loa* in families, the duties toward family dead, and the possible inheritance of food taboos are recalled. Like all these survivals, that of food taboos is not as clear in its expression in Haiti as in its aboriginal setting. Its determination is largely by trial and error, so that a mother, before the birth of her child, not only abstains from eating the foods harmful to her, but later carefully tries these on the child to ascertain their effect. Yet the custom, at best, is a tenuous one. Sometimes, if food uncongenial to a parent has ill effects on a person, "he goes on eating it until he becomes accustomed to it"—though this statement brought forth an emphatic dissent from another Haitian: "Not I! If a food harms me once, I am through with it."

Africanisms are particularly marked in the organization of and attitudes toward the ancestral cult. Today the fear of the power of the dead is as living in Haiti as in West Africa, despite the influence of the Catholic Church in changing concepts of the heavenly world of the dead and the role of ghosts on earth. It is quite true that the outer forms of ceremonialism taken by ancestor-worship in West Africa have disappeared; but when the meticulousness with which the rites of death are carried out, and the institution of *mangé morts* are remembered, it is seen that the spirit of African ritual observances has by no means been lost. African elements have survived even in the services for the dead, now largely taken over by the Church. On the anniversary of death a special commemorative mass is sung in the church, which the family of the dead attend in a body. Before they leave the habitation for the mass, however, animals are killed to provide meat for the feast which follows the Church service, and for the *mangé morts*, which also takes place at the same time. Immediately after the mass a reception takes place at the house of some member of the family who lives in town, or at the home of a friend, where cakes and liquors are served. At about noon, however, family and friends proceed to the habitation, where

1: Herskovits E-4,5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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a *mangé* is given, and that evening, when the feast ends, dances are held. Two or three *tonnelles* are provided, the most important of these being the one where the Martinique cycle, the social dances most beloved by the ancestors, is danced. In one of the remaining two a European *bal* is held, and in the other are the *vodun* dancers. Thus even in connection with a commemorative Church mass for the dead the *mangé morts* and the dancing of African dances are included.

The institution of plural marriage, which is socially recognized though not legally sanctioned, is obviously African. Though the *placée* is held in respect and her place in society carries no reproach for herself or her children because of any connotation of immorality, it is of significance for an understanding of the manner of cultural change that prestige in marriage goes with the monogamic union blessed by the Church, and that the "*wife*"—the woman who is addressed as "Madame"—holds definitely higher social position than the *placée*. Officially the Haitian State is in accord with the position of the Church and recognizes only the European monogamic marriage. Socially, however, African plural marriage is not only tolerated but accepted as a matter of course, and in those instances where plural marriage takes on its most exuberant form, as when men of position have as many as six or seven *placées* in addition to a legal wife, its very size tends to give such a family group, or at least its head, the enviable esteem of his fellow-citizens.

Within the family, the deference toward older members and the duties and attitudes toward parents-in-law are African both in form and in spirit. The exaction of guarantees from a young man before marriage, and the necessity of his proving to the family of his fiancée that he can support her, are perhaps in their generalized form universals, but as found in Haiti show once more a retention of specific aboriginal traditions. On the other hand, such aspects of marriage as the formal *lettre de demand* sent when a match is arranged, or the

1: Herskovits I-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3 Mirebalais

d'Angole) is obviously Angola, while the designations Ibo and Congo speak for themselves. Simbi is a Congo deity, as are Bumba and Lemba. Finally, in the categories of gods important in the regions of Haiti other than Mirebalais are the Loa Sénégal, and the Loa Mondong, both of which are names of African tribes mentioned in the early literature as contributing to the Haitian slave population. But all recognition of geographical names as such has disappeared, and they have been transmuted into designations of gods.

Outstanding here is the word *vodun* itself, already indicated as Dahomean, where it is a general term for "deity," though in Haiti its use has become more restricted and the symbol for deity has become the word *loa*, or *mystère*. The origin of the designation *loa*, which has been claimed to be a corruption of the French *roi*, is debatable. It is true that in West Africa certain deities are regarded as kings, yet this derivation is not convincing in view of the fact that in the *vodun* cult as found in Haiti at present or as described in earlier sources the *loa* are never generally referred to as kings, something that tends to strengthen statements that have been made to the effect that the word comes from the language of a Congo tribe.[1] The source of the root *hun-*, which figures in the terms *hungan*, *hunsi*, and *humfort*, is clear, for in Dahomey it is a synonym for the word *vodun*. *Hungan* and *hunsi* are even more definitely traceable than *humfort*, since the ending *-gan*, the Dahomean word for chief, designates the priest as the chief of the spirits, and *-si*, "wife," is employed in the sense of "wife of the god" or his devotee, in Africa as in Haiti. The female counterpart of *hungan*, *mambu*, cannot be definitely assigned, but may be of Bantu derivation, and is certainly an African word.

Other uncontaminated Africanisms can be discerned in the attitude of the Haitians toward the *loa* and in the ceremonies for them. One of the most characteristic is the inheritance of *loa* in families, a direct survival of the belief which not only

1; Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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makes for deification of the family dead, but constitutes the oldest ancestor of a relationship group one of the great gods and thus causes families to give primary allegiance to a restricted number of deities. The most striking aspect of this tradition preserved in Haiti is that all ceremonies must be given by family groups, and at them only members of the family may with propriety become possessed. Possession itself, and the elements which constitute the possession complex — the use of the drums, the rhythms associated with particular gods, the importance of songs in calling the spirits, the mode of worship through specific dances for specific deities — these make up another series of Africanisms. In the dance itself the use of iron to sound basic rhythms for the drums, the outer form and function of the rattle, and the fact that the circle of participants always rotates in a counter-clockwise direction, are equally African. The modes of behavior to be observed as possession comes on and the psychological release that follows it both derive from the same source, as do the beliefs that rituals must be held on the days sacred to the particular god being worshipped.

Another retention of African tradition is a belief in the importance of sacrifice. It will be remembered that it is held to be more essential to "feed" the gods than to dance for them. This is also the tradition of all peoples of the region from which the slaves were derived, and in a sense reflects the very immediate relationship that obtains between Africans, or Haitians, and their gods. Since in both regions each deity performs the double role of doing good for those who worship it properly and harassing those who neglect it, the importance of giving adequate sacrifices to avert evil is evident. In both Haiti and Africa, however, these may differ with the wealth of the individual giving the offering, with the number of persons who contribute toward the ceremony where offerings are given, or with the seriousness of the situation which the deity is being asked to remedy. That the gods permit such varia-

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CHAPTER XI

[1] Compare Parsons (I), 173–4, where the cult of twins is discussed and some of its rites described.

[2] Price-Mars (I), 35, mentions this as a power believed to be held by twins.

[3] The phrase "cult of the dead" as employed here must be sharply differentiated from its misuse by Seabrook (82 ff.).

[4] Cf. Price-Mars (I), 34.

[5] Price-Mars (I), 34, speaks of the custom of always burying charms with the dead.

[6] Wakes have been described by Seabrook, 89–91, and others, but in such a manner that it is difficult to dissect out the reality of what was witnessed from the imaginative elements.

[7] Cf. Wirkus, 221–3. The custom of giving the dead food at the grave, which he describes, is not followed when burial occurs in the Mirebalais town cemetery, nor, seemingly, elsewhere in the valley.

[8] See the description of a commemorative rite for the dead in Price-Mars (I) 148–50.

[9] This is a rule followed in West African practice.

CHAPTER XII

[1] An interesting attempt to account for this is found in St. John, 230–1, where he speaks of the "two Vaudoux sects," one good and one evil.

[2] St. Mery, i, 36. The term *garde* is almost entirely absent in later writings, the more sensational *wanga* (*ouanga*) being preferred.

[3] Léger, 55, note 34.

[4] Cf. Dorsainvil (I), 171.

[5] No better summary of this could be had than that in Parsons (I), 179, written after a single séance with a *gangan*.

[6] Pp. 324–31.

[7] Mr. J. C. Trevor informs me that during a recent field-trip to the Virgin Islands he discovered books of magic in common use, obtained from a Chicago dealer.

[8] It is not without interest to note that in the case reported in a Port-au-Prince newspaper and reproduced in facsimile by Seabrook, 334, concerning a woman from the commune of Mirebalais accused of sorcery, the name of the woman was *Azéman*.

[9] Cf. Parsons (II), 596.

[10] See above, pp. 94–5.

[11] The closest correspondence

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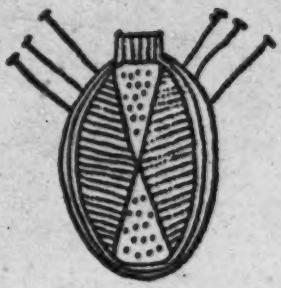

Preface

Every student of Haitian life is soon impressed by the richness of the materials spread out before him and the necessity of limiting his field of investigation. A study of Haitian religious practices, for example, draws one deeper and deeper into profusion, variation, and contradiction. One finds little difficulty in drawing a generalized picture with swift, bold lines; but when he descends into detail he discovers that the broad generalizations of the religious system contain within them many shifting and even warring motifs, and that what in one region is held to be true is not so regarded in another. The gods of *Vodoun* that are revered in one village are given only perfunctory treatment in another. Rites for the dead have a common denominator everywhere in the country, but each community brings to them something of its own or emphasizes traditions that elsewhere are forgotten. So it is also with music and dancing. A traditional drum rhythm may have one name in the north and another in the south, or a certain rhythm may be called by different names. There are diverse opinions about which dances are preferred by certain deities. The meaning of a song can be interpreted differently by different people. It is therefore no wonder that competent works on Haiti do not completely agree with one another in many respects, or that they seem, now and then, to be saying different or even contradictory things. Yet in many instances the seeming inconsistencies are in reality only minor variants within an overall scheme.

The purpose of this book is to present a broad view of certain aspects of Haitian culture and wherever possible to extract some of the flavor of Haitian thinking as well as its sense. It is easy to be fooled in regard to both. I remember seeing an old bearded man in the mountains beyond Furcy walking around his freshly hoed garden breaking a ripe tomato into small juicy bits which he scattered on the ground. It was about as primitive a method of planting as I had ever seen, and I wondered if even

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793 approval of the candidate's elevation is needed. He is also regarded as
[969] being on more intimate terms with the family ancestors who, likewise,
[783] must be in accord with the proceedings. The candidate for the asson is confined within the hounfor for a number of days, during which he takes purification baths and participates in other rituals. The rites that take place during this period are prescribed by the elder priest who has assumed responsibility. When the purification is ended, the candidate emerges into the *peristyle* (roofed court) to participate in the general service, and to undergo further tests.

Present during the ceremonies are all the principal houngans of the region—men who will be friendly associates of the new priest or, possibly, unfriendly competitors. The candidate is tested on his knowledge
[789] of how to use the asson and the tiny hand bell, and in the course of the service he is mounted by the loa who is the chief protector of the cult tem-
[782] ple. Animals are sacrificed, and all the loa sacred to the hounfor are invoked and asked for their approval and support. But it is not only the loa
[794] and the dead who must indicate their approval. The elder houngan polls the hounsi kanzo on whether they will accept their new cult chief and fol-
[533] low him. He also asks the chief drummer, who polls his assistant drummers. It is taken for granted that the decision is in the hands of the hounsi. The consensus is known before the actual service, but the formality of asking the question is observed. Should the hounsi refuse to accept the candidate for the asson, the elevation cannot take place.

793 The city and the countryside contain many self-styled houngans and
554 bocors who are not recognized as bona fide by the community, regardless
62 of the route by which they claim to have achieved their station. Sometimes
[791] they are regarded as *pas fort* (not strong); that is, they do not have profound knowledge and understanding. The Haitian is quick to detect the difference between a houngan who knows and one who does not know. Many are stated to be outright fakes. One man who attempted to hold a service in Port-au-Prince aroused such contempt and disgust that a number of persons who had been drawn by genuine interest walked out with remarks that the man should be punished. In fact, his failure to show any
[533] essential qualifications for the houngan's role was commented upon in a song of ridicule that made its appearance at a secular dance that same night. The song noted some of the humorous aspects of the service, such as when the "impostor" struck himself vigorously on the head with the flat of a machete to show his "strength" and virtually incapacitated himself for the rest of the evening.

346 It is easily observed that no two hounfors are exactly alike. They differ

[R 30]

4. *Death Rites*

775 776 The community of the Haitian is one that extends far beyond his immediate family and his village, for it takes in not only the various loa but multitudinous dead relatives and ancestors. Some Haitians believe that the dead live in close proximity to the loa, in a place called "Under the Water." Others hold that the dead have no special residing place. But it is the view of many that a dead person may eventually become a loa in his own right. How this happens is not entirely clear. Under certain circumstances the spirits of the newly dead do not go quietly on their way but remain behind to annoy and harass the living. They must be buried with [769] suitable ritual and properly placated throughout the years; otherwise their activities and influences will be unpredictable. Many of them, under special conditions, become almost indistinguishable from loa. And a few, in the course of time, become minor deities in the pantheons. The main loa of the Pétro cult, Dan Pétro, formerly was believed by some Haitians to be a houngan of the eighteenth century who had been buried without having his own loa removed from his head. There are African precedents for [171] deified ancestors' becoming deities. Indeed, some of the great *vodouns* and *orisha* of the Dahomean and Yoruban pantheons in West Africa are believed to be deified clan ancestors or great kings.

775 197 Whether they achieve the status of loa or not, the spirits of the dead must forever be coped with. This Haitian view of the dead is essentially that held in many parts of West Africa. Speaking of West African belief in general, Maurice Delafosse noted:

> After a creature dies, only his spirit remains. It survives with the same character, the same personality, affections and hatreds as during his lifetime, but it can no longer command the vital breath. It becomes all the more powerful on escaping from the confines of its material envelope, since it no longer needs to direct and control the functions of the body, and is not itself regulated by the vital breath. . . . These spirits are all of the same nature. They are invisible but can see and judge everything that happens. They are easily angered and mete out severe punishment to anyone

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offending them. They are also vain and capricious, can be conciliated by prayers and gifts, and propitiated by sacrifices. This animistic religion . . . includes many variants of the worship of countless spirits of men's ancestors and innumerable spirits of nature, all ranking as gods.[1]

Another observer, speaking of the Bapindi, the Babunda, and other related tribes of the western Congo draws quite similar conclusions:

> The people of these tribes recognize a supreme deity, Nzambi, creator of all things. But this supreme spirit is too distant from men to enlist active worship on their part. The basic worship is to the ancestors of the clan. The clan is in effect a community consisting of all the living and the dead descended from a common ancestor. Towards the dead it is necessary to make offerings as a mark of deference when one wishes to consult them on problems. The dead are spoken to through the chief, who uses a special drum for this purpose. The dead have the responsibility of protecting their descendants.[2]

Among the Bantu people of South Africa, also, the worship of ancestors is based upon the belief that when a man dies he continues to influence the lives of his relatives remaining on earth. He is as interested as ever in descendants who remain "outside on the earth," but indifferent to members of other communities unless they bear them some grudge. The characters of people who die are not changed by death. They are as prone to jealousy in death as in life, and as rancorous toward descendants who wound their vanity, flout their wishes, squander their bequests, or infringe the ancient laws and customs of their clans; but they are also as willing as ever to help those of their lineage who treat them with becoming respect and obedience.[3] The affairs of mankind in general do not concern them; they are exclusively interested in their own family and tribe, and without their help and guidance their living descendants cannot hope to flourish. As long as the moral code is strictly followed, they confer blessings and abundance; but if offended by any breach of custom, they can also send drought, cattle plague, tribal or personal disaster, sickness, or death.[4]

This deeply rooted concept of the relationship of the family to its ancestors continues to motivate the Haitian in his observance of services for the dead.

In addition to the ordinary dead with whom the Haitian has to deal, there are the spirits of twins, known as *marassas*. As there are feasts for the ordinary family dead, the mangé morts, so there are feasts for living and dead twins, the mangé marassas. Twins are believed to have special powers, and even when alive they are given more than usual consideration. The spirits of dead twins are especially willful and capricious, and unless properly placated they may cause illness and misfortune. Once each year, on dates fixed by local custom, special services are held for the marassas.

[1,2] [Footnotes appear on p. 350, Category 116.--Analyst]
[3] [Willoughby, The Soul of The Bantu, pp. 88-89. Cf. p. 350, Category 116.--Analyst]
[4] [Footnote appears on p. 350, Category 116.--Analyst]

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The dead twins are offered food in special earthen or gourd bowls. In any market place where pottery is sold you will find the joined marassa double or triple bowls. The annual rites for the marassas are routine, but once every five years there is a *grande service* for them.

It is not merely the twins of one's immediate family that are served, but twins—that is, the spirit of twins—in general. They are supplicated even when a family knows of no incidence of twins. In part, this precaution is a recognition that there may have been twins among ancestors long dead and forgotten. It is also recognition of a twin spirit as a separate force affecting all people. The twin spirit has been personified in the loa named Marassa. The child born after twins is believed by many Haitians to be even "stronger" and more to be placated than twins themselves. He is known as a *doçu* if a boy, *doça* if a girl. Their patron loa are known as Marassa Doçu and Marassa Doça. The patron loa of triplets is Marassa Trois. Triplets are regarded as a special category of twins. Some Haitians, in fact, believe that the twins are merely a partial manifestation of the group of three, which is completed on the birth of the doçu or doça. In the marassa feast, triplets are served in the triple clover-leaf bowl, as are twins in combination with their doçu or doça. It is also believed by some that the child born before twins is "weak" both in physical vitality and psychic powers, because his strength has been sapped by the marassas who have followed him.

For some Haitians the loa Marassa is the most potent of forces to be placated at the time of death. They hold that he is only incidentally the patron of twins and triplets. His significance is said to lie in the fact that he is the spirit of the first of all human children who died. And as the child precedes the man, Marassa is the first and foremost of all loa. When a service is held for Marassa, he is given foods and beverages that all children love.

Rites for the dead continue endlessly for the living. Before a child is witness to a death in his own family he may observe many rituals for the family ancestors, twins, and the unknown dead. For those who are a part of Vodoun, the cycle is a perpetual one in an endless system of integration and continuity.

Special rites are held to remove the loa from the head of a deceased person. It is believed that the spirit of a person who has not had his loa removed will be restive and perhaps will even cause difficulties for his family and his descendants. And there is also the matter of the loa's welfare. The *mait' tête* is, in a sense, a captive in the head of the person who has died. The head is his home. But should the corpse be taken to the graveyard without the loa's having been removed, the loa would refuse to be buried

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

beyond the obvious fear of contagion. In his study of Dahomey, Herskovits notes:

> . . . Small-pox is believed to be sent as a punishment for grave offenses in the eyes of these [the Sagbata] deities, and it is taken to indicate that either the dead person himself or a member of his family has committed some heinous crime such as the practice of black magic. A person who dies of small-pox may only be buried after permission has been given by the chief priest of the Earth cult.[20]

Thus, in Haiti, though the connections with the past are clouded, it is clear that victims of lightning and smallpox are treated as a special class of criminals or malefactors.

Ordinary malefactors such as malevolent criminals and murderers—until recent years, at least—were not buried in the common graveyard. They, too, were segregated at the periphery of the cemetery or buried at the edge of a trail or road where the traffic would not permit them to rest and where their graves would be under constant surveillance. The roadside grave sometimes was also the fate of a person killed by lightning.

That these special burials are related to the Dahomean and Yoruban concepts of retribution for crimes against the deities is supported by the similarity of treatment accorded victims of lightning and disease and common criminals. In Haiti, Herskovits observes: "Those who die of small-pox or leprosy, suicides, or persons shot as a punishment for crime are not buried in the communal cemetery, but in special sections of the graveyard," the suicides and criminals being set apart from the others.[21]

Graves found near the seashore, lake shores, or riverbanks frequently are declared to belong to persons who died of drowning.

Approximately nine days after a person's death, the "last prayers" are said, and the soul of the deceased is presumed to have departed from the house. Once more, under the tonnelle outside there are games, storytelling, and singing. On this night, however, there is also drumming and dancing of a special kind. Usually it is the Juba, or Martinique, dance, which is believed to be specially enjoyed by the dead, and it is the older people, rather than the young, who participate. These festivities are believed to give cheer to the deceased and to "encourage" him on his way. On the next night comes the mangé mort, the feast for the family dead, a ritual which continues periodically through the years.

Sometimes in Haiti you may come upon an old tomb or grave before which a dish of specially prepared food has been set. This is part of the mangé mort ritual.

A man may make provision in advance of his death for the rites which follow his burial. He may designate special animals to be killed, leave

[20] [Ibid., pp. 397–398. Cf. p. 350, Category 116.--Analyst]

[21] [Herskovits, Life in a Haitian Valley, p. 214. Cf. p. 350, Category 116.--Analyst]

763 764 special funds to defray expenses, or even set a day for the "last prayers"; and it is said that misfortune is likely to overtake his family if his wishes are not carried out. Métraux cites a story of a man who had told his wife that if he should happen to die on a Sunday she should hold "last prayers" for him on a Tuesday. It happened to be a Tuesday when the man died.

763 764 784

They held the burial in the afternoon. As they began the prayers on Wednesday, the last prayer finished on Wednesday week. But as Brother Lédan had always said they should hold his last prayer on a Tuesday, his wife was quite willing to hold it Tuesday. One Tuesday when everyone knew that the last prayer was being held, his wife heard her brother-in-law who told her that wasn't customarily done [that is, shortening the period of prayers]. Then she put off the last prayer.

Thereupon, according to the story, two strangers appeared in the house. They were offered chairs and they sat down. Suddenly, one of the men arose and said that the woman had announced that a last prayer was to be said that day. She said she had put it off. Then the other man got up and said: "Wasn't it today I ordered you to hold the last prayer?" The woman asked, "Who are you?" But both men disappeared. The woman fell unconscious, and died three days later.[7]

● 769 The cycle of honoring, encouraging, and placating the spirits of the dead moves continuously. There is no beginning and no end. Although those who have died are no longer seen, they are part of the great community which encompasses those whose names are remembered and those who are forgotten, including ancestors who never left the shores [761] of Africa. Death is merely another aspect of life, and its forces are ever present.

22 [Hall and others, op. cit., p. 103. Cf. p. 350, Category 116. -- Analyst]

794 in a circle around the two boiling pots. On the seventh circuit of the
787 course, the laplace stopped him at the first pot. The houngan grasped the
789 man's free hand and, bending down, dipped it into the boiling oil. There
796 was no visible indication of pain. They moved to the second pot, and the
793 man's hand was dipped again. They proceeded again to the first pot, where the dipping was repeated, then back again to the second pot. The neophyte's hand entered the boiling oil seven times in all. He made no sound, showed no resistance, no reflexes. Then the hounsi took him back to the hounfor. It was all over. After three days of isolation, they said, he would be kanzo.

The houngan peeled an orange, while everyone crowded close to watch. In it he found a two-gourde note. He peeled another orange and found in it a slip of paper with the name of a woman on it. She came forward, and everyone laughed. She was an old woman, the oldest of the hounsi. The houngan held the two-gourde note between his teeth. The old woman took the other end of the note in her teeth, but she had to kiss the houngan before he would let go.

796 The ritual of brulé zin, or kanzo, is of unmistakable West African ori-
794 gin. Herskovits has described a ceremony in Dahomey which in many
171 details could easily have taken place in Haiti. The Dahomean rite was in honor of the gods of the Thunder pantheon. Here, too, we find a pot of boiling palm oil, in which are the sacred dumplings: "When the fire had finally subsided and only a faint column of smoke issued from the pot, the initiate came dancing toward it, thrust her hand into the boiling oil, and lifted out a dumpling. . . ."[2] [2] [Herskovits, Dahomey, II, 165. Cf. P 351, Cat. 116.—Author]

Family Rites at Léogane

● 769 These services for family ancestors took place in the mountains above
796 Léogane at the ancestral home of my friend Libera Borderau. They were
787 conducted on the grounds of his grandmother's house. The ritual began
798 with dancing. Against the wall of the house sat the three drummers with their Arada drums. Near them, leaning against the wall, were the flags of the family loa. Also near by was a long high table serving as a make-shift altar called the *pé*. In the very center of the table in a clean white dish lay eight loa stones—old Carib artifacts. The stones were identical in shape, all of them perfectly symmetrical, resembling small, pointed cigars. In the *pierre-loas* lived the family deities, and much of the ceremony was built around them. The stones had been bathed and polished in oil for the occasion. Set around the plate of stones were numerous small *criches* (French, *cruches*—clay water jugs), glass bottles, and earthenware jars which also contained loa. On the low bench before the table, seven dishes

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were set out in a row, and before them four *couis*, the half-gourd bowls used in services to the marassa, the twin spirits.

In the house, at the center of the floor, was a round flat stone about ten inches in diameter and about two inches thick, resembling a millstone. This was the *pierre-manman*, the mother stone responsible for the coming of the other loa stones and who cared for them in the absence of the family. In this stone, they said, was the spirit of the old loa Nananbouclou. On a mat in the corner of the room two children slept.

Outside, on a chair, his back against the wall of the house, the houngan sat, his rattle and bell in hand. He had come several miles to conduct the service. Most of those who danced were his own hounsi. The houngan was "strong" and well known in the region; people said he had worked for high government officials, including the president himself.

After several rounds of Arada dancing in which children as well as adults took part, the drums stopped. The houngan and his laplace moved up to the building which served for the night as the hounfor. It was up a steep slope, about a hundred feet from the dance court. There they prepared for the sacrifice to Chébo Profiel, the honored loa of the evening. Passing in and out among the spectators was a woman who would be possessed by Papa Chébo; since he was the guest of the service, she (or the loa in her head) was free to come and go as she chose, to speak as she pleased, and to do what she wished. Mostly she shook hands with people, a ceremony which continued throughout the night. First she would offer the right hand, then the left; or perhaps both at once, in which case the hands would be shaken downward vigorously three or four times. Someone ignorantly said, "Bon soir, Madame!" and she turned on him to reprimand his insolence. She was not "Madame," she was *l'Autorité*, the Authority.

During the course of the evening the conviction became stronger and stronger in her that she was Chébo Profiel. From the time we first saw her until the end of the evening her personality underwent marked changes. She "became" Papa Chébo.

The houngan sat before a small hole, possibly a foot deep and ten inches in diameter, in front of the hounfor. The fresh earth was piled neatly to the side, and an enameled plate was set on top of it. Around the hole were the various dishes to be offered to Chébo Profiel. The laplace prayed in Latin, a short Catholic service. Then the houngan, shaking his beaded rattle and tinkling his bell, called for Chébo to "enter." He made a small maize-flour drawing around the hole, and then began the feeding of the loa. The plates arranged for the feast contained roasted maize, roasted peanuts, bread, cassava, rice, and other foods. There were bottles of rum,

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1953) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

kola (a soft drink), *clairin*, and syrup. The houngan, entreating Chébo to accept, poured a little *clairin* into the hole. The loa seemed to accept, for the *clairin* was quickly absorbed in the ground. The houngan took rice from the plate with his fingers, about the amount he might place in his own mouth, and put it gently into the hole. He was feeding Papa Chébo, literally placing the food in his mouth. After the rice, which was dry, the houngan poured in a little more *clairin* to moisten it. He ordered the laplace to break up the bread, and then he placed a small piece in the hole and washed it down with a little rum. The houngan seemed to understand that Papa Chébo Profiel was hungry, and that he was also an epicure. He allowed him to taste the roasted corn, and then washed it down with a trickle of kola. Then he gave him a taste of the roasted peanuts, and another morsel of bread. Once Chébo got his mouth too full in his zest for the meal, and the assemblage had to wait for him to finish "coughing." Then the houngan gave him a long drink of kola to clear his windpipe. After that the houngan was more careful in the way he fed him—a little cassava, a drink, a little bread. As the houngan fed the loa, some of the spectators reached over and placed small coins in the empty dish by the hole. These too were for Chébo. Finally, Chébo was through eating. The food was gone.

The houngan, shaking his rattle and his bell, blew two sharp notes on his whistle. At the door of the hounfor appeared l'Autorité, the hounsi possessed by Papa Chébo. More than ever she resembled the loa, and less than ever she resembled herself. In one hand she held a saber. Her bodily movements were spasmodic, as though she was being forced to do things to which she was not accustomed. She moved slowly into the circle, her eyes almost closed; she leaned backward, then twisted grotesquely around, jerked this way and that, buffeted by the loa. Suddenly she began to whirl. The houngan called "Tambouyél" and the drummers beat a slow complicated rhythm, a salute to Chébo. The loa had really "entered" now. There was no mistaking the jerky, irresponsible movements of the hounsi's head and shoulders. She leaned backward as though about to fall, incredibly kept her balance, rolled forward as though she were going to plunge to the ground, and twisted herself upright once more. The saber passed close to the faces of the spectators, even scratched some of them and cut their clothing. Her movements had a definitely masculine character. Chébo Profiel was a man.

She reached over to seize a chicken that was held out to her. Grasping its legs with her free hand, she continued her spinning, twisting, lurching dance. Then she cradled the chicken, rocking it back and forth until it was in a hypnotic trance. She placed it on the ground before a tiny pile

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

of ground maize prepared by the laplace. The chicken, released, sat motionless, making no effort to escape. All watched attentively, the houngan shaking his rattle and bell. Suddenly the chicken cocked its head and, seeming to see the corn for the first time, reached out and pecked at it. This was the loa receiving the sacrifice—a difficult conception if one thinks of the chicken itself as the sacrifice. "Chébo," l'Autorité, snatched the chicken up, danced violently about, the loa in full possession of her body. With a swift movement of the saber, she cut the chicken's throat and caused the first drop of blood to fall into the hole. When the chicken stopped struggling, it was left there, head downward. L'Autorité took up a cock which was given her, cradled him, and set him before the ground maize. When he pecked at it, she picked him up and danced, around and around, jerking, lunging, never quite falling. She took his comb between her teeth, supporting his body gently with her hands, and spun around and around. Then she released him, cut his throat, and placed him in the hole with the chicken.

At the side of the hounfor, waiting, was a goat (called by the ritual name Dogwé). He had a fine silky white coat and a long beard. He was brought in to the place of sacrifice, and l'Autorité dropped to her knees to embrace his neck with her arms. She remained there a moment, her cheek against his, talking to him. Then she arose, a machete in hand instead of a saber, and began to pirouette while three men threw the goat on his side. Then she cut with the machete, and the goat's blood, too, began to run into the hole. For the first time her dance became unquestionably frenzied. She swung strong, full blows of the machete at the goat's neck, finally severing the head. From the hindquarters she cut a piece of red meat and placed it in her mouth.

At a signal from the houngan, three men carried the goat's body away to be dressed and cooked, and a woman came forward to wipe the blood from Papa Chébo's face.

The drums began again, a Dahomé dance, and the people relaxed. Many joined in the dancing while l'Autorité strutted about shaking hands and talking *langage*. She also danced, with gestures and movements wholly masculine. At one point she briefly advanced on another woman, making sexual gestures.

The houngan and his houngénicon retired to the front room of the hut. A new mat had been placed there for the houngénicon. She lay down on it, and the houngan sat in a chair against the wall. This was the beginning of the ceremony of calling *les morts en bas dleau* (the dead below the water).

Meanwhile, before the hounfor, the laplace and a hounsi were building

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

the *card*, a hogan-like structure made of bent saplings covered with cotton cloth.

Rain had been threatening all evening, and now it began. Some people crowded into the hut where the goat was being barbecued. Others came into the hut where the houngénicon lay; in the back room, with the pé, Chébo, l'Autorité, strutted and shook hands with the visitors. The straw roof leaked a little, but no one minded very much. The houngan and his houngénicon, who had been under a strain, relaxed. The rain would mark the length of the intermission. Except for the sound of the rain and "Chébo's" *langage*, there was no noise. No one spoke. Then the houngan, his eyes closed, began to sing an Ibo song.

Ibo Lazile oh, éya!
Grand gout manqué tuyé moin!
A la yun an six mois m' sous la mer,
Grand gout manqué tuyé moin!

Ibo Lazile, oh, éya!
Hunger has not killed me!
One year and six months I have been under the sea,
Hunger has not killed me!

The others sang responsively:

Ibo Lazile, oh, Ibo!
Ibo grand gout pas tuyé'm, Ibo!

Ibo Lazile, oh, Ibo!
Ibo, hunger has not killed me, Ibo!

After a while the houngan called "Abobo!"—which was the signal to conclude. The rain was still coming down, and he called "Abobo!" for the rain to cease also. But it did not stop, and everyone laughed. He began another song, also Ibo:

Ianman Ibo lélé!
Ianman Ibo lélé!
Pilet pied'm mandé pardon,
Ça pardon wa fai pou moin?
Ça ou gainyan con ça? [Ex. 80]

Ianman Ibo lélé!
Ianman Ibo lélé!
Step on my foot and ask my pardon,
What will the pardon do for me?
What do you have [what are you doing] like that?

And the others came in, spiritedly:

Ianman, oh, un hunh!
Ianman, con ça'm dansé Ibo!
Ianman, oh, un hunh!

Ianman, oh, un hunh!
Ianman, like this I dance, Ibo!
Ianman, oh, un hunh!

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

While those in the front room were singing, l'Autorité, in the inner room, was suddenly thrown about violently by her possession. She raced into one wall of the hut, striking her head, flung herself back against the opposite wall, kicking, trembling, calling out strange *langage*. She crashed into the pé, upsetting the dishes, and then fell across the mat where the children were lying half asleep. One of them, a boy of about four, became hysterical. He knew the woman, but he had never seen her like this. His mother carried him to the front room, where she finally quieted his crying. L'Autorité, spent for the moment, lay across the mat. No one touched her. Later, when the singing was resumed, she got to her feet and made the rounds once more, shaking hands again and again. She was now smoking a pipe.

When the houngan heard the rain subsiding, he again called out "Abobo!" as though he were giving the order to cease, and everyone, himself included, laughed again. When it had definitely stopped, someone went out to shake the water from the canopy. The drums were brought out of their shelter, and although the ground was sticky with mud, the dancing was resumed. The houngan asked for a fast Nago dance, and the front room of the hut was once more emptied of everyone except the houngan and his houngénicon.

The laplace and his assistant went up the hill to put the finishing touches to the *caye*, the temporary structure in which the houngan was going to receive the loa and the dead. From a small chest of chinaware, the houngénicon set a "table" for the loa on the ground where she sat. The sacrifice had been for a single loa, Chébo; the rest of the service was for all the loa served by the family. The houngan, sitting next to the houngénicon, sounded his rattle and spoke *langage*. He sang quietly, a song which only the houngénicon could hear, watching her intently. A large basket of dishes, bottles, and various other paraphernelia was brought by a hounsi. Candles were lighted and set on the ground. The houngan gave a signal, and the hounsi brought a large square of white cotton cloth, which they stretched tight over the houngénicon like a canopy. The candle flame and the silhouette of the houngénicon could be seen through the cloth, but the details of the service were not visible. Sometimes, the houngan, his bell and rattle in hand, would go under the cloth to assist in the calling of the loa. Then, without warning, things began to happen very rapidly.

One of the hounsi who sat before the door began to quiver and make strange noises in her throat: "Ka, ka, k-k-k-k-k-k-a!" Her body shook violently, and her head rolled on her shoulders. Almost simultaneously something began to happen under the cloth where the houngénicon was, and the members of the family crowded up to the *caye* by the hounfor. The houngénicon lay stiffly, her eyes closed, the white cloth removed. The

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1945) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

houngan carried out the large round basket in which lay the bottles and the pierre-loas. The hounsi gathered around it, ten of them, to carry it to the *card*. In the bottles were *les morts en bas dleau* (the spirits of the dead from below the water). Carrying the flags, three hounsi danced, singing, up to the *card*. After them the laplace came, carrying in his left hand a plate of maize flour from which he made vèvès in the line of advance, simple marks symbolizing the crossroads. The drums were beating a special salute to the loa. The ten hounsi carrying the basket danced and sang. As they moved up the hill, they rotated, so that the basket revolved like the hub of a wheel. Their progress was not smooth, however; they jerked forward and backward as they rotated. Arriving before the *card*, first one, then a second, was entered by her loa. They fell, jerked, and stumbled. This was all a very good omen. The houngan called "Abobo!" for them to resist such possession, and the hounsi all sat down on the ground. The houngan placed the basket inside the *card* and entered after it. He called for his little bell, which the laplace passed in to him. The laplace closed the flap down tight, from the outside, and placed the flags against it.

Upon a signal given from within, the hounsi began a song:

La famille semblé,
Oh semblé nous!
La famille semblé,
Oh nous semblé pou nou pa'lé parole nous là!
La famille semblé!

The family gathers,
Oh, we gather!
The family gathers,
Oh, we gather to speak our words here!
The family gathers!

The laplace took his position, his back to the *card*, while inside, because of the candle burning there, the houngan could be seen setting out the contents of the basket. The candle went out, and in the *card* the little bell began to tinkle. The singing stopped. The houngan was beginning to talk to the dead below the water. First he talked *langage*. Then his voice was heard through the constant sound of the tiny bell, supplicating Papa Loko to talk a little bit with his "children." A faint, tremulous voice, that of a tired old grandfather, was heard to answer. Papa Loko was stirring himself out of a long silence. He talked a long while to the houngan. Sometimes they both spoke at once. Faintly he was heard to say that he had come a long way to see his children, and that he was very tired. But as he talked his strength returned to him, and, asking the houngan to wait, he spoke directly to his "children," who sat, respectfully and awed,

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around the *cord*. Here everyone participated. This was why they had come. Benevolently Papa Loko greeted them: "Bonjou, ti moune moin yo, c'est Papa Loko" (Good day, all my children, this is Papa Loko). Together they all answered eagerly: "Bon soir, Papa!" "Bon soir, Grand!" "Bon soir, cher Papa!" "Bon soir, cher Loko!" Papa Loko told them about his journey, and persons long dead whom he had seen below the water, and he passed on the news from the island below the sea. Then he began to address them singly, asking questions, giving news of dead relatives, and showing a vital interest in the problems of his "children." They answered him. "Oui, Papa," and "Non, Papa Loko," and took deeply to heart anything he said, whether praise or criticism:

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Bon jour, Télisman!	Good day, Télisman!
Bon soir, Papa!	Good evening, Papa!
Comment nou yé, Télisman?	How are you, Télisman?
Tout bien, Papa Loko!	Everything is fine, Papa Loko!
C'est ou même qui travaille tres dit?	Are you one who works very hard?
Oui, Papa, moin travaille an pile.	Yes, Papa, I work a great deal.
Ou travaille pou' vié maman ou?	You care for your old mother?
Oui, Papa.	Yes, Papa.
Télisman, pitit moin, faut ou planté jardin ou encore. Graine, li pas bon.	Télisman, my child, you will have to plant your garden again. The seeds you planted are no good.
Merci, cher Loko!	Thank you, dear Loko!
Ou poco blié'm, Télisman.	You do not forget me, Télisman.
Non, cher Loko.	No, dear Loko.
Yo dit ou praillé travaille en ville.	They say you are going to work in the city.
Lé'm capab', Papa.	When I can, Papa.
Pas blié moune morne ça yo, Télisman.	Do not forget the people of the hills, Télisman.
Non, cher Loko, m' pas blié yo.	No, dear Loko, I will not forget them.
Papa ou dit'm ba ou bon soir pou'li.	Your father asked me to say good evening to you for him.
Merci, Papa.	Thank you, Papa.
Papa Loko fini pa'lé ou, Télisman.	Papa Loko is through talking to you, Télisman.
Merci, Papa.	Thank you, Papa.
Chongé 'm, Télisman.	Remember me, Télisman.

Papa Loko talked in turn to everyone in the family who was present, and inquired, sometimes suspiciously, after those who were absent. After many minutes, Papa Loko said regretfully that he had to go away, and bade them au revoir. They were all sorry he was leaving, because he was well loved. He spoke a few words with the houngan, and then his voice faded away. Only the tinkling of the little bell remained.

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1963) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

Then, faintly, came the broken voice of an old woman who was crying. The houngan said her children were waiting to see her, and asked her to enter. Moyise had been dead many generations already, but she was still crying over the circumstances of her death, and because she had left her children behind her. The houngan, speaking gently, asked her to try to stop crying because her children were waiting. Little by little she controlled herself. She greeted them all and talked with each member of the family in turn. She showed a special interest in the women and children and was concerned about family problems.

After Moyise went away, Docile, Moyise' daughter, came. She greeted them all and then complained that when she had died she had been buried in a grave near that of a thief; now she wished for her body to be moved. Alixe, on whose place the grave was situated, promised to take care of the matter, and Docile became placated. Her voice faded away. Inside the *card*, the houngan talked *langage* and rang his bell.

After Docile came Joseph and his son Jougleau. Joseph and Jougleau timed their entrance badly and came in together, both talking at once. The houngan tried to straighten out the situation, and for a moment the three of them were conversing simultaneously. Then Jougleau withdrew and returned when his father was through. After Jougleau came still later generations, represented by Ti Perci and her children, Na and Bernicia. Bernicia came crying bitterly about something. The houngan asked her to stop, because he could not bear to hear women crying. Everyone laughed, and Bernicia controlled herself.

Then Damballa Wèdo, the ancient loa, came, speaking with an aged and broken voice. Feebly he sang his song in "African" language:

Ago! Damballa Wèdo!
Oh Damballa Wèdo kian kian!
Oh Damballa Wèdo kian kian!
Oh ha ha ha Damballa Wèdo kian kian!
Oh Damballa Wèdo kian kian! [Ex. 39]

Later, Damballa sang again, calling on Legba to act as witness to his words:

Ago-é Attibon Legba oh él
Oh Damballa Wèdo é kélé manyan!
Oh gainyain jou' ya chongé moin là kélé manyan!
Oh Damballa Wèdo é kélé manyan!
Oh Ayida Wèdo é kélé manyan!
Oh gainyain jou' pou' chongé moin là kélé manyan! [Ex. 40]

Ago-é Attibon Legba *oh él*
Oh, Damballa Wèdo *é, kélé manyan!*

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Oh, a day will come when they will remember me here, *kélé manyan!*
Oh, Dumballa Wèdo *é, kélé manyan.*
Oh, Ayida Wèdo *é, kélé manyan!*
Oh, a day will come for you to remember me here, *kélé manyan!*

During the evening about twenty loa and ancestors came into the *cord* to talk. When the last had finished speaking the hills were already light, and the service was over.

Service for Èzilie Fréda and St. Jacques Majeur

This service took place not in the open but under a tonnelle surrounded by four walls, adjoining the hounfor of Alexis Stephan on the west fringes of Port-au-Prince. Separate from the hounfor and dance court was a shrine to the "dead" loa Gèdé Nimbo. The shrine was a small shed open on one side. Within, lighted by flickering oil lamps, was a life-size effigy of Gèdé, a scarecrow-like figure dressed in the loa's traditional attire—black tail coat and trousers, and a tall opera hat. On the otherwise blank face of the figure were smoked glasses with white rims.

The dancing was progressing under the supervision of the houngan's adjutant, the laplace. He wandered among the drummers and dancers, encouraged the singing, and issued orders here and there. No one seemed to take him very seriously. There was a good deal of joking, and the gathering seemed very much like an old-fashioned family reunion. There were perhaps a hundred dancers and spectators—friends, relatives, and devotees of Stephan's hounfor. Everyone was watching with affection an old woman who could not be restrained from dancing. She executed old classical steps and postures with a skill that called for running comment all around her. As each piece came to an end someone would step up to her and say something like: "Woy, Manman, mais ou passé mwé!" (Oh, Mother, you are better than me!). Then they would attempt to get her to sit down again, but she would only shake them off and urge the drummers to get going if they were not too tired.

Eventually, the houngan, Stephan, made a casual entrance through the door of his adjoining hounfor. He held the usual ritual rattle and bell in his hand, and sauntered around to chat with his friends.

Gradually, almost imperceptibly, the dancing became more serious. Soon, only the hounsi, the female servitors, were dancing. The drums played a salute to Legba, the first loa to be called upon in a Vodoun service. For it is Legba who opens all gates and all highways, and who paves the way for communication with other deities. Though he is not the greatest of the loa, he is one of the most ancient. The houngan spilled water on the ground as a libation, and the dancing continued.

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itself was transplanted from Africa, where in old times as well as in modern it was a staff of life among those who lived by agriculture. The word "yam" is known throughout large parts of Africa, crossing language lines and forests. It signifies the big root on which the African is so dependent, and it also has the general meaning of "eat." In Senegal it is called *nyami*, while across the width of Africa and in the upper Nile region it is called *nyam*.

In Haiti the yam is a tie with the past and a symbol of fertility. When the yams are plentiful, there is food for the winter months and a sense of well-being. When the yam crop is poor, there is insecurity and even hunger. Whatever occurs, lurking in the background is the shadow of the family ancestors, for it is they who have the power to enhance the crops or blight them. This is the concept around which the mangé yam is built.

The annual harvest feast, on the twenty-fifth of November, is rooted in the need for placating the ancestors, so that the dead will insure the fertility of the fields. Before the feast, no yams may be eaten, for the crop must be "baptized" first. Should this rule be violated the yams will spoil and those who eat them will become sick. The precise form of the mangé yam varies from region to region. Sometimes it is held on the premises of the cult chief for the community at large. More traditionally it is held on the family *habitation*, with a houngan in attendance. It is felt that an important obligation rests upon those who have wandered away from the homestead to return for the occasion. For the fate of the family depends to a large degree upon the successful appeal to the vast host of the ancestral dead, and the solidarity of the living in this effort is regarded as vital. Even if one belongs to a Christian sect which proscribes Vodoun, he is obligated and ready to come, for the welfare of the family is paramount. Catholics, Adventists, and Protestants alike participate. As the Haitians say, it is an affair for all who eat yams, and that means all Haitians.

Yams are washed and prepared for eating during the service. They are cut in small portions, placed in dishes or calabash bowls, and offered to the dead, who have prime rights. All categories of the dead are fed—those who are remembered, those who can be recalled only by name, and those whose names are forgotten. The dead of Haiti are invoked, then the dead of Africa. The marassa dead are fed from separate gourds or bowls, and a special table is set for the ancient dead who move slowly because of their age or infirmities, and who may take a long while to arrive at the mangé. A share of the yams is offered to the family loa. Then the members of the family receive symbolic portions. There is singing, drumming, and dancing, and sometimes ritual baths are taken. Afterward, when the yam feast is ended, the crops may be gathered, stored, and eaten.

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In the Artibonite Valley, where much rice is grown, a similar ceremony takes place before the rice is gathered from the fields. In this ceremony it is rice that is shared with the family ancestors, who have first rights, and with close friends who have aided with the planting. This feast is called *mangé diri*, or sometimes *gouté diri*, the tasting of the rice. Small amounts of rice are taken from the fields, cooked with red beans or Congo beans, or perhaps made into dumplings. The farmer's friends and relatives gather while the food is still cooking, and play games such as *wari* and *trois-sept*. The children play *gage* games and sing songs, and sometimes a *malt' conte*—a storyteller—comes to entertain them.

When the food is finally ready, the family ancestors are given their share. The farmer takes a calabash bowl of the rice and walks around the house grounds calling upon his immediate ancestors to accept their share. He drops a little food on the ground for the remembered dead, for the unknown dead who preceded them, for the Haitian dead, and for the dead of Africa. He also drops small portions for the dead twins, the dead albinos, the deformed dead, and the dead who have lost limbs, and for the distressed dead who have been improperly buried, or who may not have received the feasts that were due them. Afterward, he offers food to those who died of drowning, or who were lost at sea and never heard of again.

Each course is shared with the ancestors. The farmer takes a pitcher of water, spilling a little here and a little there until the dead have quenched their thirst. He also gives a little of everything to the family loa. Then the calabashes are set out on a bench or table reserved for the dead, and this food is not disturbed. Food for the marassas is set out separately on the ground in three small *couis*, or gourd dishes.

The family ancestors whose good will has made the harvest possible having been taken care of, the food is now shared among the extended family and the friends who helped in the fields. Later there are prayers to the loa, the saints, and God, led by the houngan or a prêt' savane. To finish the affair, there may be Juba-type dances for the older people, while the children watch or play *gage* games.

Only after this service are the farmer and his family and his *coumbite* (mutual labor group), if he belongs to one, free to go out and harvest the rice.[1]

These feasts of the rice and yam harvests are not of New World origin. Similar harvest festivals for yams or rice are held over a wide area of West Africa. There, as in Haiti, the fundamental concern is with the family ancestors, whose good will must be constantly nourished so that the rains continue to fall, the crops flourish, and human beings remain fertile. Among the Ashanti of Ghana, for example, the yam and rice harvests are

[1] Account given by Jean Ravel Pintro. Cf. P. 351, Category 116. -- Analyst]

2: Courlander B-S (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

celebrated with elaborate rituals for the dead. As in Haiti, great importance is laid on the presence of all living descendants, whose numbers are calculated to influence the ancestors' behavior. And as in Haiti, the first yams and the first rice are offered to the dead, and only after the family ritual does the family divide the crop.[5]

Service for the Assotor Drum

The *assotor* drum is the largest and most sacred of all Haitian drums. Around it is built an impressive and elaborate service known as the *mangé assotor*, which, according to local traditions and circumstances, may be held as often as every three years or as infrequently as every twenty-one years. The period between mangés always consists of an odd number of years. A houngan from Jérémie declared the service might properly be held every three, five, or seven years. Another cult priest in the Cul-de-Sac Plain said it could be held every seven, seventeen, or twenty-one years. The assotor is known as the *plus grand moune* (the most venerable "man") of the hounfor. However, few cult centers possess an assotor. "Assotor c'est fort bagaille, c'est pas zaffai tout moune" (The assotor is powerful, it isn't everybody's affair), Haitians say. This is what a man from Jérémie tells about it:

"The assotor is the greatest of all things in the hounfor. The Rada drums are only for the Dahomey nation. The Congo drums are for the Congo nation. The assotor is a man of Dahomey, but he is for all nations. It is for all loa—Pétro, Congo, Bumba, Dahomey. The assotor belongs to Dahomey, but when there is a great service the assotor is the host to the loa of every rite, the loa of Haiti and of Africa. When the assotor is played, the loa are awakened everywhere. Loa who have been forgotten by the Creoles (Haitians) will come to the service and mount people, and when the loa have gone, many people don't know what loa has been riding them. Some ancient spirits from far away come only to the assotor service, and when it is over they aren't heard of again.

"The assotor drum is not for small things, it is for great occasions. For some people there are no occasions in their whole lives great enough for an assotor service. When all other things have failed, it is only then that the assotor is called upon.

"If a big houngan should have an assotor drum, he can have only one, and it is the chief of the hounfor. All other drums are its servants. You can make an assotor, but it is not necessarily an assotor. It may look like an assotor and not be an assotor. To be an assotor it must not only have the shape of an assotor but it must be accepted by the loa. There was a houngan near Jérémie who made an assotor and held a great service with it,

[5] [Informant: Albert Kofi Prempeh, Ghana. [115] Cf. p. 351, category 116. -- Analyst]

2: Courlander B-3 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

comes quietly. Pié Cassé comes crawling because of his broken feet. Each loa comes in his own way.

"First there is dancing for the Congo and Pétro loa. There is dancing for the Kanga and Ibo nation. Last of all is Dahomé, for the assotor belongs to the Dahomé nation, and Dahomé is the host.

"The assotor service is the biggest of all services. It last fifteen days. Old people say that once there were services lasting more than twenty days. Every day, animals are killed—bulls, goats, pigs, chickens, turkeys—all according to the loa who are there to be fed. When Moundongue is fed, a dog's ears are clipped in his honor, because Moundongue is fond of dogs. More happens in the assotor mangé than all the rest of the year. Dahomé is host to the other nations, so the Rada service comes last. But the assotor drum is the host even to Dahomé, and it is fed last of all.

"The assotor drum is dressed in the finest of clothing and kerchiefs during the mangé. It is the king of everything.

"When the mangé assotor is ended, when the drum has been fed, there is an immediate Mass held in church for the souls in purgatory. You don't need to have any special reason, but you must hold the Mass for all the dead. You serve coffee, sandwiches, cake, and other refreshments for all the people.

"When there is no mangé going on, the assotor is kept in a special place in the hounfor. Every seven or nine months the houngan has a special *rappel* beaten for it on the Rada drums, and rum is spilled on the ground for it. It is a great responsibility to own an assotor. But it does great things for the houngan who owns it."

Service for Mait' Grand Bois at Anse-à-Veau

Orthodox tradition in the region of Anse-à-Veau places the loa Mait' Grand Bois as the most potent and venerable of deities. He is the supreme mystère, whose good will or eccentric whim determines the fortunes of all men. Somewhat subsidiary to Grand Bois, but served within the same rites, are two other non-Dahomé loa—Moundongue (of Congo origin) and Ibo. Older people of Anse-à-Veau regard this trilogy, along with Femme Grand Bois (the wife of Mait' Grand Bois), as the core of "Guinée" ritual. There is also a second group of deities, consisting primarily of Ogoun Feraille, Ezilie, and Fréda Dahomé; these loa are of the Dahomey family and are regarded as somewhat less important. Should services for any of them be held, they follow rites for the Grand Bois constellation. People in this region hold that there is only one Ibo loa, one Moundongue, one Ogoun, and one Ezilie, each of them with many names or manifestations. Legba, the Dahomean spirit of procreation,

[For footnote, see Category 116, P. 351. --Analyst]

[P. 75]

6. Songs of the Peristyle

The songs that are sung in the peristyle are virtually numberless and have a wide range of themes. In general, they are in the spirit of supplication or placation. Preponderantly they relate in some way to the deities. A loa may be described, invoked, or called upon to perform certain deeds. He may be cajoled, joked with, and even criticized. But it is all a family affair. The servitors and the *fidèles* are the loa's "children," his "horses," his "leaves in the woods." The loa, the spirits of the dead, and the living members of the cult are all members of the same "nation." Whether supplication or admonition, the songs of the peristyle and the hounfor all have an intimate character. The affairs of the loa are the affairs of the société. What concerns one individual concerns all.

The themes of the songs have to do with the drama of the cult ritual, the coming and going of the deities, sickness and death, the welfare of the dead, and the behavior of the living.

The cult service is a dramatic presentation which synchronizes and brings into sharp focus the heritage of religious and folk beliefs. The songs describe and evaluate what is going on. Sometimes they are cryptic and tangent, but to those participating and those watching they are clues. As the action is usually related and progressive, so are the songs. Each song has its own place and its own meaning. One song is not readily interchangeable with another. Each service has its appropriate music. So does each developing phase of the hounfor ritual.

Some of the songs are addressed to the loa; others seem to be the words of the loa themselves. In many of the songs there is an implicit dialogue between one or more loa and the singers. This dialogue is not rendered in a form which is immediately understandable to a stranger. There is a constantly shifting point of view, so that sometimes the words are third-person comments about the loa or the situation,

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

as *hounfor*, *hounsi*, *houngénicon*, *hountor*, etc. *Mystère* is of obvious French origin. *Loa* is probably from the Bantu, but it could be from the Yoruba.

[2]Various methods and formulas are employed in "tying" a loa. Sometimes making the sign of the cross is regarded as adequate, or the saying of a prayer. In "The Vodun Service in Northern Haiti" (*American Anthropologist*, XLII, 242–243), George Eaton Simpson reports that the "tying" of a loa sometimes results in a contest between the individual concerned and his houngan. If the houngan wants the *maît' tête* to come in, he must neutralize the ritual barriers the "horse" has put in the way. "One procedure for bringing on possession in a servant who has tried to 'tie' his chief god is for the priest to stand in front of the person whom he suspects, make the sign of the cross, and strike him on the forehead three times with a sacrificial stone. Usually these blows are hard enough to make blood spurt. The servant then begs the pardon of the angry god, and as soon as possible he unties the knots in his handkerchief [the method he has used for 'tying' his loa]."

[3]Herskovits, *Dahomey*.

Chapter 4: *Death Rites* (*pp. 30–40*)

[1]Maurice Delafosse, *L'Ame nègre*. Translation from *Free France*, special issue No. 4, French Press and Information Service, New York, June, 1943.

[2]Leo A. Verwilghen, in booklet describing peoples of the Kwango region, accompanying *Music of the Western Congo*, recordings issued by the Ethnic Folkways Library.

[3]Willoughby, *The Soul of the Bantu*, pp. 88–89.

[4]W. M. Eiselen and I. Schapera, "Religious Beliefs and Practices," in Schapera, *The Bantu-speaking Tribes of South Africa*, p. 250.

[5]Translated from the French of Aubin, *En Haiti*, p. 212.

[6]Herskovits, *Life in a Haitian Valley*, pp. 213–214.

[7]Hall and others, *Haitian Creole*, American Anthropological Association, Memoir No. 54, pp. 188–189.

[8]Simpson, "Four Vodun Ceremonies," *Journal of American Folklore*, April–June, 1946, pp. 155–162.

[9]As translated by Courlander from Simpson's Creole text, *ibid.*, p. 156. The preceding paragraph is from p. 155.

[10]Translated by Courlander from the Creole of Simpson's text.

[11]This and the preceding paragraph are from Simpson, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

[12]These shells, as indicated elsewhere, are part of the paraphernalia of the Vodoun priest and appear to be an inheritance from the priests of the Fa cult of Dahomey. The divining shells are usually thrown on the ground in fours, and the readings depend upon combinations of "heads and tails." The manner of throwing the shells, as well as the number used, corresponds closely with the Haitian secular gambling game *mayamba* (see Appendix 2), though the purpose is obviously different. In some priestly rites in Haiti, ashes rather than the customary shells are used for divining.

[13]Simpson, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

[14]*Ibid.*, p. 161.

[15]Herskovits, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

[16]Herskovits (*ibid.*) notes that persons who die of smallpox, lightning, and certain other phenomena are not buried in coffins. Some of my informants indicated this to be their understanding also, but they said that the dead are buried without coffins for strictly economic reasons as well.

[17]Simpson, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

[18]Leyburn, *The Haitian People*, p. 156.

[19]Herskovits, *Dahomey*, I, 398.

[20]*Ibid.*, pp. 397–398.

[21]Herskovits, *Life in a Haitian Valley*, p. 214.

[22]Hall and others, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

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and set apart on special plates in a separate room for them; in the afternoon the family eats the food. If the twins to whom homage is being offered are still alive, they must wear special clothes at the sacrifice.

"I believe in the careful cult of the dead . . ." Once more it is necessary to renew one's acquaintance with primitive and folk belief to grasp the Haitian attitude. Life is desirable, death is dreaded; both death and the dead are feared. In the actual world, any excursion from the comfortably familiar countryside of one's home leads to confusion and bewilderment. Except in the company of his fellows (on a religious pilgrimage to the waterfalls at Ville-Bonheur, for example), a Haitian almost never leaves his valley or mountainside and market town. Sophisticated people view the unknown with pleasurable excitement, for they have learned by experience that the unfamiliar is not necessarily frightful; it is quite the contrary with simple folk, whose meagre experience with the unfamiliar has been at least somewhat alarming.

Death is the ultimate unknown. The fearsomeness the imagination conceives to lie beyond death seems to exist in almost direct proportion to people's ignorance of the material world. The fear of ghosts is a commonplace among primitive folk, as among the uneducated in the "civilized" world. Where ghosts are considered powerful, one part of any comprehensive cult will certainly deal with the dead.

In Haitian Vodun the teachings of the Catholic Church have exerted more influence upon the cult of the dead than upon any other part of the religion. The preparation of the corpse for burial shows no traces of African practice; the watch (or wake) and wailing over the deceased is familiar; the funeral itself is conducted by a Catholic priest, with burial in consecrated ground. Thereafter, the continual efforts to secure the tranquil repose of the departed bear the earmarks of faithful Catholic practice; it is at this point, however, that the cult begins to assume distinctive features, for it is firmly believed that the dead exert tremendous power in the world of the living. This power comes from God—the Christian God. The case has been put succinctly by Sumner and Keller: "The relation between man and ghost resolves itself . . . into a relation of rights and duties, with all the rights on one side and all the duties on the other."[30] God gives

30. W. G. Sumner and A. G. Keller, *The Science of Society* (New Haven, 1927), II, 829.

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the dead a right to whatever their survivors possess, and moreover gives them the right to return to earth as ghosts.[31]

Strict rules of mourning prevail, both as regards clothing and behavior. The slightest lapse in the observation of these rules would cause resentment on the part of the dead; fear of retribution would be quite enough to ensure conformity even if public opinion did not. Ghosts have the power to possess mortals, not as the loa do at a Vodun service or dance, but in the manner understood by American Negroes who say they have been "ha'nted," and so, continually thinking of the dead, live in nervous fear of a streak of bad luck. Such possession is a form of persecution, with continual consequent bad luck until the survivor has carried out all his obligations. It is especially significant, however, that a departed spirit takes vengeance only in matters thought by the Haitian to concern the Church. The ghost is not whimsical in his possession of mortals, and cannot resent treatment which is his due. The kind of treatment given a corpse depends upon the kind of death he died: a person struck by lightning, for example, would have no ceremonies at all, for lightning is an act of God.

Where the cult of the dead departs entirely from the teachings of the Church is in the matter of magic, a topic shortly to be treated. It may be briefly stated here that ghosts can be summoned back by special adepts for purposes of divination; that certain corpses are thought to be revivified by evil persons who use these soulless, pathetic automata as slaves (these are the notorious *zombis*); and that black magic—that is, powerful influence for evil—can be worked by sorcerers who know how to command ghosts.

All other articles of the Vodun creed not already discussed, except one, come under the heading of magic. That exception is the statement: "I believe in the Holy Catholic Church." The fact is as simple as the affirmation. If the Catholic priests fight Vodun, preaching frequently against its beliefs and practices, that is unfortunate, think the peasants: Vodun does not retaliate by fighting Catholicism. God and the saints have their province, and the loa theirs. The mind of the Haitian is simple enough to accept both sets of spiritual beings, and not philosophical enough to worry over the contradiction. Practically every Vodun worshiper thinks of himself as a Catholic.[32]

31. See Herskovits, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

32. In this sketch of the Vodun creed, it has been constantly emphasized that each locality has its own variations both in belief and practice. The reader who is interested in pursuing the subject further should consult the works of Price-Mars, Herskovits, Dorsainvil, Parsons, Hurston, et al. See Bibliography.